

Alameda County Public Defender

Main Office
1401 Lakeside Drive, Suite 400
Oakland, California 94612-4305
(510) 272-6600



Brendon D. Woods
Public Defender
Robert C. Shipway
Chief Assistant Public Defender

California's First County Public Defender Immigration Representation Project

On January 21, 2014, the Alameda County Public Defender's Office made history by launching California's first public defender immigration representation project. The office hired **Raha Jorjani** as a full-time immigration attorney and "crimmigration" expert. Since 2009, she had worked part-time consulting public defenders in the Office regarding immigration consequences of criminal convictions. In her new position, she now also represents noncitizen clients in subsequent removal proceedings and helps them obtain lawful permanent resident status in the United States. Since her January hiring, she has followed a number of clients into immigration court.

This marks the first time that a county public defender's office in California has appeared on behalf of clients in immigration court. Ms. Jorjani, a nationally recognized expert in the intersection of criminal and immigration law, had proposed her new position as a direct response to the lack of procedural safeguards available to noncitizens in removal proceedings, including the lack of a right to appointed counsel for indigent noncitizens facing deportation. What happens in criminal court can have disproportionately punitive consequences in immigration court. Her hiring recognizes that effective representation does not end at the courthouse doors.

Ms. Jorjani has nearly a decade of experience in representing noncitizens detained by the Department of Homeland Security and facing deportation. Before joining the Office full-time in January, she spent nearly 7 years as a Clinical Professor at the UC Davis School of Law, Immigration Law Clinic. She also has extensive experience -- both locally and nationally -- in training members of the criminal defense and immigration bars regarding immigration consequences of convictions. Along with directing the Office's immigration representation project, she carries an active caseload. She also consults with other Alameda County offices, including the Sheriff and the District Attorney, to develop policies to help them navigate the increasing complex intersection of law enforcement and immigration.

The Alameda County Office of the Public Defender sees Ms. Jorjani's hiring as an important shift toward a more holistic model of indigent defense, and invites other public defenders to follow in its footsteps. To that end, the Office is available to provide guidance and technical assistance to California defender offices who are interested in exploring similar programs. For more information, please contact Ms. Jorjani, Immigration Defense Attorney, at (510) 268-7401.